

Transcription: Thomas Herring

Today is Monday, August 2, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and I'll be interviewing Mr. Thomas Herring. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Herring is at his home, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.

Thomas Herring: You're welcome.

Yes sir. The first question we pretty much always start off with with any of these interviews is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the service.

Thomas Herring: OK, I was born on a farm, and the fact is I farmed until I did go to the service. I signed in for the service in October of 1942, and they let me go ahead and finish high school, and I graduated from high school on a Friday evening I believe, and the next Wednesday I was on my way to Camp Walter in Mineral Wells, Texas. Then three days later, I was on my way to Camp Roberts, California, where I trained in the infantry.

What town were you born in and raised in?

Thomas Herring: Jacksonville, Texas.

Jacksonville, Texas, so you were born and raised there?

Thomas Herring: Yes.

So you went to high school there.

Thomas Herring: I went to high school and graduated from Jacksonville High School.

So if you went in in October of '42, then I guess you would have been in your junior year of high school when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Thomas Herring: Senior year of high school.

Senior year, OK. What are your memories of the day Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Thomas Herring: Well, a friend of mine and I were at my house and I don't know whether, it was probably at 1 o'clock or a little after 1 o'clock, my mother came in and she had been listening to the radio, and she said that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese. And I said well where in the world is Pearl Harbor? I wasn't familiar with that. And so anyway, we found out it was in Hawaii. Anyway, that was my first impression of Pearl Harbor.

When you learned that that had happened and that we were going to war, did you think at some point you'd be going to war yourself?

Thomas Herring: Yes sir I did. I thought it wouldn't be long until I probably would be going.

So tell us then how it came about that you entered the service. Were you drafted or did you sign up?

Thomas Herring: I signed up before I was to be drafted, like I said I signed up in October but I didn't go until the next May of the following year. That was what I did as far as going into the service is concerned. I wanted to go.

How did you come to choose the Army?

Thomas Herring: Well I don't know, that was just the first thing that came to my mind I guess, so I showed at the Army and they put me in the infantry.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Thomas Herring: Yes, I have one sister and three brothers.

OK, and were they older or younger than you?

Thomas Herring: They were all older than me. I was the youngest in the family.

Were any of them in the service at that time?

Thomas Herring: Yes, I have a brother Emmett who actually went to the service in 1938, and he was in the service when they bombed Pearl Harbor, and we entered the war with Japan and Germany. He went overseas to North Africa. He was in the medical corps and he went to North Africa and Italy.

So your parents then when you told them that you were going to sign up and go in the Army, they didn't have any qualms about that?

Thomas Herring: No, they didn't say anything. My mother didn't want me to go, but she didn't try to keep me from it.

So you signed up and you had a little bit of time before you had to ship off to training.

Thomas Herring: Yes sir, I had from October until May.

Did you have any friends that enlisted with you?

Thomas Herring: Just one. I had one friend that went with me, and I don't even remember his name. He wasn't really a close friend, he was just somebody I knew.

More of an acquaintance.

Thomas Herring: Yes, an acquaintance.

When you got shipped off, tell us what your memories are of going to boot camp.

Thomas Herring: Well, it was kind of scary in a way. I didn't know what to expect because I hadn't ever talked to anyone who had gone before me, and anyway, it was kind of scary to me, what was going to happen. I didn't know what boot camp was or what the aspects of it was.

Was that your first time away from home?

Thomas Herring: Yes it was. That was also a little bit scary, too.

You mentioned before, but where again was it that they sent you to?

Thomas Herring: To California to Camp Roberts.

And what was that place like?

Thomas Herring: It was a beautiful camp actually, it was in a little valley with kind of little hills all the way around it, and it had the largest parade ground in the world, and the camp was situated around a huge parade grounds, and so it was kind of hot because we went and of course we were training in the summertime, but it was not bad. I enjoyed being there.

So you actually enjoyed basic training.

Thomas Herring: I really enjoyed the camp because we did a lot of things, and we had some free time, and we could do what we wanted to do.

What were the other guys in your platoon in boot camp, the other recruits, what were they like?

Thomas Herring: They were pretty good guys. I was in the 87th Infantry training battalion, and we were upstairs in two-story barracks, and we were upstairs and we had a pretty nice guys there. We had fun. We became friends.

Were most of them about your age?

Thomas Herring: Just about my age. There was one or two that were older, but most of them were around my age.

Yeah, 18-19 years old.

Thomas Herring: Yes.

So how long did you spend in training there?

Thomas Herring: We went in in May and if I'm not mistaken we left in November.

OK, so a pretty long period of training. So that was all of your basic training and then any follow on training as well, specialty training?

Thomas Herring: Right, that was the basic training. We trained in infantryman and actually I was in the communication end of it, and we learned different kinds of communication instruments and radios and different kinds of things.

Yeah, so you did more than just basic infantry training. You did also radio training out there as well. So you go through all of that training. During that time, are you following what's going on with the war pretty closely?

Thomas Herring: Yes we did. We kept up with it pretty much every day. We were told by our platoon leader of the things that were going on and where they were fighting and all of that. So we kept up with it pretty much.

So when did you finally learn that you were actually going to get to go into the war zone yourself?

Thomas Herring: Well, from Camp Roberts we went to kind of a staging area and it was Fort Ord, California. We stayed about three or four weeks there, and we continued our training while we were there. We went on long marches and hikes and that kind of thing, to kind of keep us in shape. And then from Fort Ord we went to Angel Island, which was the last stage before going overseas. That's where we received all of our equipment that we were going to use overseas and it was out in the San Francisco Bay, a little island out there that was an old fort, and they were using it as a staging area. It was out past Alcatraz. I remember when we went on leave to San Francisco while I was there, and they stopped at Alcatraz to pick up some guards on a ferry, we were on a ferry, and then we went into San Francisco, and when we came back, we stopped back by and left off some guards that were going on duty. We got to go to Alcatraz. That was a funny feeling.

That's right, it was still being used.

Thomas Herring: It's not anymore but it was then.

When you were at Fort Ord and you were getting ready to ship out, did you know at that time if you were going to the Pacific or the Atlantic theater or any of that sort of thing?

Thomas Herring: We weren't sure where we were going, but we figured that's where we would go because we were on the Pacific coast area, and we figured that we would kind of be going to the Pacific. We didn't know for sure because they hadn't told us yet.

When you finally did depart, what type of ship did they put you on?

Thomas Herring: We went over on a former Dutch luxury liner. It was called the USS Amsterdam, and whenever the war broke out in Europe, they went to England, they sailed to England and they had attached themselves to the English Navy, and so that was the ship that we went over on. We went from, that was I think about January, on the 1st of January, we went to New Zealand from there, from San Francisco.

How long did that take you?

Thomas Herring: Oh, about 30 days actually, a good long while because what they do, or what they did was they would zig-zag through the Pacific because of the threat of Japanese submarines, so they zig-zagged and went across the Pacific, and they didn't have any certain route that they went because they knew that the submarines would probably be waiting for us. Anyway it took us a while to get there.

What did you do during 30 days aboard ship? What did you do to keep yourselves occupied?

Thomas Herring: They had a little library and we read and we did exercises every day on the deck, and all that kind of thing.

How was the food on ship?

Thomas Herring: It wasn't very good. It was pretty bad actually.

Did you have to spend a lot of time in line before you would eat?

Thomas Herring: Pretty much, yes.

I've interviewed some other veterans and they've mentioned that that was one of their memories that you would have to stand around for a very long time because there was only so much space to eat, and it was so many men aboard the ship, and then it seemed like you would eat and then as soon as you were done eating, it was almost time to get in line again for another meal.

Thomas Herring: That was one of the things. We did have to stand in line a good long while in the food line before we were fed. And mentioning the food, the food was worse on that ship than any ship I was ever on, and I was on three or four, but the rest of them were American ships. This one happened to be attached to the British Navy.

What was it like when you finally arrived in New Zealand?

Thomas Herring: I thought it was really a beautiful country and it is. We landed at Auckland and we went in a ways and we spent about a month in New Zealand. That's when I joined the 25th Infantry Division. They were there and so they had just come out of combat from Guadalcanal. They had assisted the Marines in defending Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, and the 161st Infantry Regiment, and that was the regiment I was going to be attached to. Anyway, they had just come out of Guadalcanal and came to New Zealand to regroup and to take on replacements for those who had been killed and injured on Guadalcanal. So I was attached to the 161st Regimental Combat team, and the headquarters company for the 3rd Battalion, and that was my new assignment.

How long did you end up spending in New Zealand?

Thomas Herring: About a month. Then we went from New Zealand to, well we trained a little bit in New Zealand, but not much, and we went to, I can't think of the name of the place, for the rest of our training, and once we left there, we went to the Solomon Islands and landed on Guadalcanal and stayed there a little while, and then on up to Mannis Island, and northeast of New Guinea. From there, they went on into combat.

Tell us a little bit, sir, what your thoughts were before you actually went into combat.

Thomas Herring: Well, that too was a little bit scary of course. They hadn't told us, we felt like we were going into combat, but they hadn't told us that because we'd been issued all our new equipment and our new rifles and all of those kinds of things, ammunition and such, and anyway until we left Manus Island, we were only three ships in our convoy. When we got to Manus, we spent about a couple of weeks on Manus Island, and then one morning we woke up

and looked out in the harbor at Manus and it was just plum full of ships, and they were the ships that were going in our convoy that we were going into combat with. We found out that they had all kinds of war ships.

So that was a big sign you I guess and your fellow soldiers that something was coming.

Thomas Herring: Yeah, we knew that something was coming. They had battleships and cruisers and an aircraft carrier or two, and a lot of smaller warships that mine sweepers and different kinds of things that they had there, and then when we left Manus, that's when they told us where we were going, that we were going to invade Luzon in the Philippines. We were, they had asked us to detour and go by Leyte which had just been invaded by an infantry division, and they were being pushed pretty hard, about to be pushed off of Leyte, and they said we might have to go in and help them. But as we went by Leyte, then they found out that they had it pretty well under control and they were gaining ground in Leyte. But our warships, the cruisers and battle wagons, they provided artillery for the division that was on Leyte, and they fired those big guns over our heads, so it was quite a show.

What did you think at that time about your own personal situation? Were you worried at all or did you feel - ?

Thomas Herring: I was worried and I could tell I didn't know what to expect, again, I knew that we were going into combat and we also knew that this was not a training thing, this was for real. So I didn't know what to expect and we didn't know what to expect when we made the beachhead. We were in the first couple of waves that went into Luzon and I now whenever we got to Luzon and I remember that they shelled the beach before we went in there from the big battleships and battle wagons, and I remember they fired over our heads and it was deafening. You couldn't hear a thing. The guns were really pounding the beaches and stuff, and we were out on deck with our full equipment on. They had issued us our ammunition and we were ready to go, and from the side of the ships the rope ladders went down into the boats, the landing craft, that was kind of scary because they told us to keep our heads down, and when we went in, we had some firing. It wasn't a real bad situation where we had a lot of opposition, but we had some opposition, and so anyway, they were firing artillery shells at us and they were hitting the water with mortar shells. When we landed on the beach, the firing stopped and anyway we went in a little ways and set up a bivouac area and so that was my first experience. By that time I wasn't so scared anymore because we hadn't seen a lot of action at that particular time.

What were you told by your leadership at that point, your platoon commander or your platoon sergeant? Did they tell you much about what was going on, what was going to happen?

Thomas Herring: Yeah, they told us, they briefed us pretty much on what was going on. We knew that we were going to have to go out on patrols and things. So the next morning, my group were told that we would have to go out on patrol, and so I was getting ready to get my pack and all that ready to go, and they started shelling us with artillery shells, and one landed in a coconut tree right over my head, and that was the first, I was wounded and that was my first encounter really with a harmful effect of war I guess. Anyway it wasn't bad. It just hit me in the back and I didn't even have to go back to the aid station. They just patched me up and sent me out on patrol.

So you didn't have any fragmentation that had entered you or anything like that?

Thomas Herring: No.

So then you went out on the patrol. Tell us a little bit, sir, what your first patrol was like.

Thomas Herring: Well they had four tanks with us from the attachment of tanks that they had with the division, and we followed those tanks down a little road, and my first action, the Japanese had dug in along this little highway, and they had what we called fighter holes. They were round holes and they were about the size of I guess a 55-gallon barrel, and they dug those round holes and they would put camouflage in like the surrounding area and put grass and stuff on 'em and you couldn't see. They let us get past, and then they opened up and fired on us and we were cut off from our division. Two of the tanks were, we got within about I guess 400 yards of a little town called Benalua, and they let us get past those fighter holes and then they opened up and fired and two of the tanks were knocked out by anti-tank weapons that they had there at the edge of town, and they were burning and the guys were killed inside their tanks. I remember we got at the side of the road in a drainage ditch. There were rice paddies on either side of the road and they had drainage ditches there where they irrigated that rice, and we got into a drainage ditch and I looked up on the highway and there was a guy that was wounded and he was just laying there and I could see he was moving, so I ran back up on the highway and they were firing at him. Anyway I picked him up and carried him back down to the drainage ditch and fortunately I didn't get hit. I don't know how I missed doing that, but anyway, I doctored his leg. He had the calf of his leg was cleared open, clean to the bone from his knee all the way down to his ankle, and I doctored him as best as I could, but I wasn't an aid man, but I used my bandages and stuff that I had on him as well as his because it was such a massive wound. Anyway they finally came and got him and carried him out. That was my first encounter with any kind of really firing upon us, rifles and machine guns. That was my first baptism by fire I guess other than the artillery fire.

Did you receive any recognition for having rescued him?

Thomas Herring: I got the Bronze Star.

That's great. When you ran and got him, did you even think about the situation or was it just instinctive reaction at that point?

Thomas Herring: No I really didn't. I don't know, I did it by instinct I guess. I just knew he needed help so I just went and got him. For that action I was supposed to have gotten a Silver Star but I didn't get it.

Well the Bronze Star is still quite an honor though. That is really something.

Thomas Herring: Yes it was to me.

How much longer was it before you were awarded the Bronze Star?

Thomas Herring: Not until I got out. It was a long time before I got it.

Did you kind of even forget about it or did you know it was still in the works?

Thomas Herring: I didn't know I was supposed to get it. I knew I was supposed to get the Silver Star, I didn't get it, but I didn't know I was going to get the Bronze Star.

So your platoon commander told you he was going to put you in for the Silver Star. That's great. So after you'd helped to rescue that soldier, tell us what further happened in the battle.

Thomas Herring: From that action, we went the next day, actually the next afternoon – we spent the night, the first night, out in those rice paddies behind the enemy lines. They were still behind us. We went to clear 'em out early the next morning and that afternoon we went into Minnaloa. That was a little town. It was probably a town of about 3,000-4,000 people, and we cleared out Benaloea the next day and the next night.

What was the reception like that you received from the local citizens?

Thomas Herring: Well, we didn't see any of the local citizens until after we cleared the town, and then suddenly they appeared from everywhere. I don't know where they were or where they came from. Anyway, we were well received by them. They were trying to get rid of the Japanese.

I guess that had to have made you and your fellow soldiers feel good that you were able to liberate them.

Thomas Herring: It did, it made us feel good that they received us pretty well. The first afternoon, when we were still in Benaloea and they were still fighting, my patrol took a little rest at an old farmer's market that had comfort cables and had a rock wall around three sides of it. The back side was a little creek bed, and I know we were standing on the, resting, setting on the tables before we took off again, and all of a sudden a tank started to fire at us from that creek bed, and we broke the 100-yard dash getting behind those rock walls. So we called our backup bazooka, a little rocket gun, and they knocked the Japanese tank out.

With a bazooka. Wow. And you could see that?

Thomas Herring: I saw it, yes.

Wow, that's really something. So once the battle was over, at that point did you kind of have a feeling, I've asked this of a lot of veterans, did you kind of have a feeling that we were going to defeat the Japanese, that we were kind of pushing them back?

Thomas Herring: Yes, I remember having the thought that we were going to beat them. I know after that, we went through some pretty rough times and some pretty big battles, but we came through them and kept pushing the Japanese back, and I didn't have any other thought other than that we were going to win.

Did you get a lot of mail or packages from back home?

Thomas Herring: Very little. It was hard to catch up with it. I remember I got a package from my sister and she had made a bunch of cookies and then sent me and I think when they got there, my box was broken open and I think I had three cookies left. That was the one package that I got when I was there, and I didn't ever get much mail.

Did you have a girlfriend or a wife back home?

Thomas Herring: No, I didn't have a wife or girlfriend either. I wrote to some girls that were just friends. They weren't my girlfriends or anything.

So during that time when you were there in the Pacific, your older brother was in North Africa and then into Europe?

Thomas Herring: Yes, he was in Europe, and my brother was in a shore patrol. He was an SP in the Navy, and he was in San Diego, and my older brother. He never did go overseas or anything. He stayed in California.

Did you know much about your brother in Europe about how he was doing at all through letters from home or anything?

Thomas Herring: When I did hear from home which was like seldom, they would keep me kind of posted on where he was and how he was doing. Which he wasn't on the front lines, so he didn't have to worry too much about that kind of thing. He was in a medical corps and he was in one of the field hospitals, and so that's what he did. He wasn't up on the front lines. They just took care of the wounded as they came back from the front lines.

So tell us then what it was like when everything was finally finished in the Philippines and you had gotten rid of the Japanese forces there.

Thomas Herring: Well one of our worst battles I guess came toward the end of the Luzon campaign. It was called Bonzai Ridge, and we were climbing up in the mountain area, and what we were trying to do, we were trying to get to Palady Pass which was the pass through the mountains, to Kagayan Valley which ran from Manila all the way up to northern Luzon to the summer palace of the president. He spent summers up there. Bageel was the name of the little town that his palace, and we were trying to get to this Palady Pass so we could get into this other valley and go north, and it took us about three or four weeks from Palady Pass to clear out the ridges. Every night just about we had a bonsai attack. We would stack them up in piles. You could hear 'em start off chanting after dark, and after they started the chanting, they would get louder and louder and finally they came screaming down the hill and down the ridge toward us, and we would have to ___ our machine guns and whatever all we had to keep them from coming in to our position. That was rather scary as well.

I would imagine having anytime somebody is running at you in combat like that.

Thomas Herring: I spent a lot of time on patrol up and down the ridge and I know we went up to try and find another patrol that didn't come back. They sent us out to find out what happened to them, and it was a patrol from another company. When we found them, they had annihilated them. They whacked out the whole patrol.

How many men were in that patrol?

Thomas Herring: Probably 10 or 12, I'm not quite sure, but about 10 or 12, and some of the remains were hard to identify, and they chewed 'em up pretty good.

How did that affect you, or did it affect you at all?

Thomas Herring: Yes it did. It kind of made me sick to my stomach.

Did you know any of those men?

Thomas Herring: No, it was from another company and I wasn't well acquainted with any of them that I knew of, and so anyway, we came back, reported to them what happened, and anyway we went up and they sent a _____ detail up to take care of them and basically some of them they brought back down and some of them they couldn't find. It was kind of a mess. That was what made me sick.

Where did you and your unit go to after the Philippines?

Thomas Herring: We were relieved. After we took the Bonzai Ridge area and secured the Palady Pass, we were sent back to a little rear area to regroup and that's when we got some new personnel to take care of some of the losses that we had. We probably had the largest losses in the Philippines, I mean in Division. Anyway from there, that's when they dropped the atomic bomb was while we were there. We were getting ready to make an invasion on Japan but we didn't know that, and so after they signed the surrender, about three days, we were forwarded out to go to Japan, and we were the first troops into Magnolia, and that was a little scary, too, because we didn't know what to expect when we got there.

To go back a second, how did you learn that the atomic bombs had been dropped? Did somebody tell you about it?

Thomas Herring: Yes.

Did you believe it at first or did you feel pretty certain it actually had happened?

Thomas Herring: Well, yes I believed it, but I didn't know what the magnitude of the thing was, and yes, I believed it.

And then when VJ Day was announced, tell us what that was like for you and the men in your unit. When you learned that the war was over and the Japanese surrendered.

Thomas Herring: We were celebrating, we were happy because we hadn't known until then. They told us what our mission was going to be next after the Philippines. We were going to make a landing on the southern island of Japan, and we found out that they reported about two or three divisions in the area, Japanese troops in the area, but we found out later they had over 20 divisions of troops in the area, so they probably would have annihilated us had we gone in.

Sure, it would have been a big mess.

Thomas Herring: Just three divisions that were going in, and I think it was the 10th Corps to be assigned to, and we were going into the southern island of Japan, and that was the next objective because there wasn't anything else left. We'd taken about everything else, the Philippines were secure, and a lot of the islands, Okinawa and Iwo Jima and all of those were secured, and it wasn't anything else left but Japan. It was scary. After we found out that we were to go into Japan it was scary. They told us we were going in as an occupation -

Occupation force?

Thomas Herring: That we would be going into Nagoya, and anyway, we landed and the landing boats were making the beachheads, and we had our guns and everything. It's like it was the real thing because we didn't know what to expect, us being the first troops and all. And it was only three days I think after the surrender term that we went in, and anyway, we found people lining the beach area as far as you could see in both directions, and a lot of them were soldiers still in uniform, Japanese soldiers still in uniform. They didn't have any arms or ammunition or anything, but they were waiting. When we went in, we decided, we didn't know what to expect what they were going to do. And all they did was just stand and look at us and didn't say anything. The only thing, person that I saw that came toward me and he was kind of a tall Japanese, but he came to me and asked me in perfect English, he said what part of the United States are you from? I said I'm from east Texas. He said well, I'm from Idaho. And I said well what in the world are you doing over here? And he said well I came over here to see my mother and dad and he said I came to America when I was a teenager, and my sister was already in America, and I came to live with her, and he said I left my mother and dad here, and time to go back to ____ and visit them. Just before Pearl Harbor I got a message that they were in very ill health and weren't expected to live. So he came to Japan to see them, and Pearl Harbor happened while he was there -

Got stuck.

Thomas Herring: And anyway that's what he told me and I said well, are you going back to America? And he said on the very first chance I can get out of here. They lived in Idaho, and he had a big farm and he told me what they raised, potatoes and great northern beans and I don't know what else that they raised. He said that anyway, he said he was going back. His wife and his children were still there.

Wow, I'm sure that kind of felt like a small world type thing. The last thing you expected was to run into somebody like that in Japan. And he was serving in the Japanese military at that time?

Thomas Herring: Yes.

Wow, that's quite something. You said most of the people were just very quiet, they wouldn't interact with you or they were afraid of American troops?

Thomas Herring: Yes they were, because the Japanese people, they didn't bother us and we didn't bother them. We were given strict orders not to fraternize with them or anything, and so we couldn't. What we did after we got there, we set up our camp, a big giant tent on an airfield, Japanese airfield, around the edge of it, and when we first got there, there must have been 20 or 30 brand new Japanese Zero fighter planes along the edge of the runway that they had pushed off to the side in a straight line, and they had taken their propellers off of them and put them down in front of it. They had been told to do that. And anyway, we were bivouacked on that particular air field, and what we did, we patrolled the streets in Jeeps out in Nagoya. We had about five streets that each Jeep would patrol, and we had three men per Jeep, the driver and two other guys with rifles and we had a machine gun mounted in the back, and we didn't know if we were going to have trouble or not, but we weren't expecting anyway. Anyway we patrolled the long streets. We'd go up one street and down another, up one street and down another, and we had about five streets that we patrolled in those Jeeps. That was our duty for about four hours, and the other rest of the day we'd go back to big warehouses along the harbor of Nagoya. The Japanese, Nagoya was one of the biggest Japanese naval bases, and in those warehouses they had all kinds ammunition, naval shells and rifles and all kinds of ammunition and that's the other thing. So

we guarded that and keep them from coming back and getting it, and anyway, that's what we did while we were in Nagoya.

How long did you ultimately spend in Japan?

Thomas Herring: We left in December around I think the 10th of December we left Japan.

So you were there for about three months or so?

Thomas Herring: We came home.

Tell us what it was like when you finally got back home again.

Thomas Herring: Well actually I was sick, I had malaria. So when I got on the ship, they put me on the ship hospital and I stayed mostly there, about 10 days to get from Japan to Los Angeles, and anyway, I spent most of that time in the ship's hospital, and when I got off, I was kind of sick and weak, and the first thing I remember, there was a Red Cross lady that was handing out milk and donuts, and that was the first milk we'd had in I couldn't tell you when, and they were gonna feed us and we had milk and donuts. It was so good to get back over to land. It was so good.

Where did you contract malaria?

Thomas Herring: In the Philippines.

And did you know pretty much right away that you had it or did it take a while?

Thomas Herring: It took a while for me to realize I did because we were taking medication, atabrine was the name of the medication that we took, and even though you had it, it wouldn't show up until you quit taking that medication. So somewhere along the line whenever I was told that I was going to go home, at the staging area there in Japan, I took down with malaria. Then when I got on the ship, I was afraid if I told them that they would put me in a hospital and I wouldn't get to come home. So I didn't tell them I had it. Anyway, I was really sick. But anyway, by the time I got on the ship they put me in the ship's hospital.

How long was it before you were able to kind of get over that?

Thomas Herring: I had it when I got home and I went to a doctor here in Tyler, and he same me some other kind of medication and I finally got over it. It took me a good long while, but I finally got over it. I've had spells of it occasionally. But I finally got over it and I haven't had it since.

That's good. I know that some people they can have it and it'll pop up later on and that sort of thing.

Thomas Herring: That's the way it did for me for a while, but it finally I guess the medication they gave me finally helped because I got over it.

So what was it like, sir, the day you finally got back home to, I guess it was Jacksonville?

Thomas Herring: It was to Tyler. In the meantime, my folks had moved from there to Tyler, and so anyway, I came in about midnight -

On a train?

Thomas Herring: I knocked on the door and they weren't expecting me. Anyway, they were really surprised to see me. They didn't know I was coming home. They knew I was in the States, but they didn't know exactly where. I don't think I wrote them and told them where I was. I came from California to Fort Sam Houston and that's where I was discharged in Fort Sam Houston, and then from there back home.

What was that like when you got back home? Did it take any time for you to adjust or to get back into the swing of things?

Thomas Herring: A long time, a long time. It was really, I was really depressed and it took me a while to get over it, and here we were in combat situation where we were in danger, and suddenly you're out of it. We left the Philippines and went to Japan and then we were out of the danger area, and when we came home, I don't know, it was kind of a depressing thing. I don't know what caused it, but at any rate, I guess all the people you befriend and all that got killed and stuff, it bothered you. It's still bothering me. I still think about it to even today.

I'm sure. What did you do after you got back home? Did you start working or go to school?

Thomas Herring: No, I went to school, communication school, and went to TJSN, and then I went to work in a bank and I worked in a bank for a number of years. Then I went back to school and I went to Edison ____ to banking school and got a master's degree in finance. Then after banking career, I turned to teaching in college, and I taught 28 years.

What college was that?

Thomas Herring: Garvis Christian College.

Yes sir, that's great. Well I tell you sir, it's been an honor to be able to interview you today and to get some of your stories from your time in the service. I think it helps folks that otherwise might forget about what that was like, what the war was like, to be able to hear interviews like yours.

Thomas Herring: They did an interview with me out at Tyler Junior College some few years back and they sent the tape to Washington. I don't know where they put it, in archives or something there.

Yes sir, they do have a program like that.

Thomas Herring: They have a program, they were doing that with certain veterans they interviewed.

Ours is similar to that except ours is here in Texas and we also will, we're gonna send you copies of this interview. Again sir, it's been a real honor for us to be able to interview you today.

Thomas Herring: Well I thank you and I appreciate it.

Yes sir, well we appreciate you. Commissioner Patterson and myself, a lot of people here are veterans, but even everybody here who is not a veteran still appreciates your service for our nation. It's a small way of us to say thank you.

Thomas Herring: Thank you so much and I appreciate, it's an honor to be able to do this for you, and I appreciate you and I thank you.

Thank you.

[End of recording]